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GAO WARNS OF PLANNED SALE OF SUPERCOMPUTERS TO RUSSIA *Sale Could Enhance Russian Nuclear Weapons*

Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Chairman of the House National Security Subcommittee on Military Procurement, today released a General Accounting Office (GAO) report that uncovered disturbing evidence that the Clinton Administration is seriously considering a Russian request to facilitate the sale or transfer of highly-sophisticated, U.S.-built supercomputers to Russia's nuclear weapons laboratories. Upon release of the report, Chairman Hunter released the following statement:

"I am astounded and dismayed to learn that the Clinton Administration may soon approve export license applications for sophisticated, American-made supercomputers to Russia's nuclear laboratories for the purpose of improving the quality of Russian nuclear weapons, given the grave damage to U.S. security that could result.

"Equally disturbing is the question of whether these exports are in any way linked to President Yeltsin's support for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

"The President owes the Congress and the American people an explanation of how American security interests would be served by helping sustain and improve Russia's nuclear weapons capabilities. These U.S.-built supercomputers could be used to enhance the safety, security, and performance of Russian nuclear weapons, but they are equally capable of assisting Russia in developing new nuclear weapons designs which would pose a threat to the United States and to others. This explanation is all the more necessary given that such cooperation is expressly forbidden by the Administration's own policies.

"That the President's advisers would try to hide this deal from the Congress is probably not surprising, given the controversy they knew it would generate. Nonetheless, I recommend the President 'come clean' with the American people on why he would secretly commit the United States to helping maintain Russia's nuclear weapons stockpile without first informing and seeking the consent of the Congress.

“The Administration now finds itself caught in a dilemma of its own making: On the one hand, it does not wish to be accused by Russia of failing to live up to the President’s secret commitment to Boris Yeltsin to help maintain Russia’s nuclear stockpile. On the other hand, it knows that approving these export license applications runs counter to U.S. policy, will damage U.S. security, and will focus unwanted attention on the President’s inept handling of national security in the run-up to the election.

“I strongly urge the President to make national security concerns paramount by promptly issuing orders that the license applications shall be denied.”

The GAO report contains the following key findings:

- The Clinton Administration has held discussions with Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy (MINATOM) officials on the possibility of undertaking cooperative scientific and technical projects on topics related to the safety and security of each country’s nuclear stockpile under a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- Russian MINATOM officials have repeatedly expressed interest in the sale or transfer of sophisticated U.S.-made supercomputers, and have admitted that at least one such computer would in fact be used for nuclear weapons stockpile maintenance-related purposes.
- The U.S.-origin supercomputers being considered for export vastly exceed the capability of computers known to be in use in Russia today—perhaps up to ten times more powerful.
- Although the Clinton Administration in October, 1995, issued a new policy governing computer exports which eliminated controls on many computers, the policy does allow the Executive branch to deny export licenses for high-performance computers to Russia and other countries when the computers are intended for a military end-user and can perform over 2,000 million theoretical operations per second (MTOPS); the manufacturer of one of the supercomputers at issue advertises that its machine has a maximum performance rating of approximately 34,500 MTOPS.
- Clinton Administration policy mandates that the United States take no action that would contribute to nuclear weapons design or enhance the military performance or reliability of Russian nuclear weapons.

A copy of the GAO testimony is attached.

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